CHAPTER 8

STEP 6: CO-CREATE

8 Step 6: Co-create

Fostering a service mindset
Ongoing service interactions
Nurturing user communities

When all parties are ready for service delivery and consumption, the next step of the journey begins. It is arguably the most important; all previous steps aim to enable it and ensure that it will be successful.

The purpose of this step is for those involved in the service relationship to act together to ensure continual value co-creation based on agreed service offerings.

The scope of the service provision and consumption step includes:

- service delivery and support
- service consumption
- service usage.

The success of this step depends on the ability of all relevant stakeholders to share basic principles and adopt the service mindset. Table 8.1 outlines the purpose of service provision and consumption.

Table 8.1 The purpose of service provision and consumption

Co-create	For the service consumer	For the service provider
Facilitate outcome and experience	To maximize actual outcomes from the service consumption and service relationship To improve user and customer functional experience through correct consumption To improve users' and customers' emotional experiences through effective collaboration To improve external stakeholder satisfaction To improve employees' satisfaction To increase productivity	To improve customers' and users' loyalty To maximize outcomes from service provision and service relationships To obtain valuable input for continual improvement through feedback and moments of truth To improve employees' satisfaction To increase productivity
Optimize risk and compliance	To decrease the risk of value leakages through better alignment and realistic expectations To decrease the risk of recurring deviations of service quality through responsive support and the value-oriented prioritization of service improvements To decrease the risk of information losses through effective communications and collaboration	To decrease the probability of incidents and associated breaches in service quality To increase users' tolerance to service quality deviations through loyalty 'credit'
Optimize resources and minimize cost	To reduce losses associated with poor quality of the services being consumed To optimize the costs of service consumption	To optimize the operational costs of service provision To reduce the user support costs

8.1 Fostering a service mindset

It is important that those involved in the service provision and consumption act responsibly, consider the interests of others, and focus on the agreed service outcomes. This is called 'service empathy', a term which is often used in a narrow context of user support and related service interactions with the service provider's support agents, but should be expanded to the whole service journey.

Definition: Service empathy

The ability to recognize, understand, predict, and project the interests, needs, intentions, and experiences of another party in order to establish, maintain, and improve the service relationship.

Service empathy is an important ability of an organization and an important skill for those involved in service management. A service support agent is not expected to share a user's frustration but is expected to recognize and understand it, express sympathy, and adjust their support actions accordingly.

The level of importance of service empathy depends on the closeness of the relationship; it is more critical for the success of a partnership than of a basic relationship.

Service empathy is an element of service mindset, but it is not the only one. A service mindset also includes shared principles that drive an organization's behaviour and define its attitude towards the service relationship and other parties involved.

Definition: Service mindset

An important component of the organizational culture that defines an organization's behaviour in service relationships. A service mindset includes the shared values and guiding principles adopted and followed by an organization.

A service mindset implies the following values and principles:

- know your customer/user
- know the customer/user expectations
- focus on customer value
- take responsibility
- show empathy
- acknowledge and adapt to culture
- encourage collaboration
- show generosity

- show ingenuity, including intelligent disobedience
- never behave unethically.

People involved in the early steps of the service journey within the band of visibility are often qualified to manage service relationships and demonstrate good interpersonal skills, service empathy, and effective communication. However, at the co-create step, people who are involved in ongoing service provision and consumption may not share this service mindset.

8.1.1 Service mindset for service provision

Service mindset should be shared by all those who are involved in service provision. The guiding principles should guide all aspects of professional behaviour. Table 8.2 illustrates the key questions that may help develop a service mindset and provides examples of methods which can help develop relevant competencies.

Table 8.2 Service mindset in a service provider organization

ITIL guiding principle	Key questions	Examples of learning and development methods
Focus on value	Who are the potential customers? How do they perceive value from the services? What kind of experience do the customers expect? How can everyone involved contribute to value co-creation?	Introduction to the service consumer's business (where applicable, a visit to the service consumer's premises) Introduction to the user support (where applicable, participation in user support) Introduction to the service architecture and dependencies
Start where you are	What is the service consumer's context and history? What is the service consumer's previous use of products and services? What legacy products or relationships do the service consumers have? Do the users have any special needs or expectations? How were their needs addressed before?	History and context as part of the customer onboarding and of new employees' induction Introduction to the service architecture and dependencies Where applicable, inclusivity and special needs awareness training
Progress iteratively with feedback	What are the moments of truth and other touchpoints and service interactions between users and the service provider? What are the user service actions? How can feedback be collected about each of them? When feedback is provided, what are the procedures for addressing it? How can feedback be incorporated into continual improvement and other areas?	Training in feedback collection and processing Awareness and practical training in improvement initiation Training in processing negative feedback and effective communication techniques
Collaborate and promote visibility	Where is the band of visibility in the service relationship with the service consumer? What do we do together? Who will accept the responsible and accountable roles in joint activities? How are joint and visible activities visualized? What tools need to be used to demonstrate progress? What indicators are visible to the customers and users? Which indicators do they need to see? Which decisions and actions should involve users and/or customers? What is the cultural context of the service relationship?	Where applicable, joint training and other activities with users and/or customers Introduction to the service architecture and dependencies Introduction to reporting systems, analysis of service consumer-facing reports, and mapping of the results to the employee's area of responsibility

ITIL guiding principle	Key questions	Examples of learning and development methods
Think and work holistically	How do the services contribute to the service consumer's activities and objectives? Which teams in our organization are involved in the service relationship? Which partners and supplier relationships are involved? How does information flow in various value streams? How can information be exchanged with the service consumer, partners, and suppliers?	Introduction to the service architecture and dependencies Introduction to the service consumer's business (where applicable, a visit to the service consumer's premises) Introduction to reporting systems, analysis of service consumer-facing reports, and mapping of the results to the employee's area of responsibility
Keep it simple and practical	What interfaces are available to users and customers? What does the user journey look like? How satisfied are users and customers with service interactions? How will each decision influence user experience? If there is an experience improvement opportunity, how it can be realized?	Take the user journey Training in the service architecture Where applicable, simplified user training for service provider's teams Awareness/training in the organization's continual improvement practice
Optimize and automate	What service actions can be performed as part of service provision and consumption? Are there service actions that can be optimized? Are there manual service actions which could be automated? How can improvement opportunities be realized?	Where applicable, simplified user training for service provider's teams Introduction to the service architecture and dependencies Awareness/training in the organization's continual improvement practice

8.1.2 Services with 'invisible' users'

Key message

Service mindset is not only for the providers of direct user-facing services. It is equally important for the organizations providing infrastructure, platform, environmental, and other services that do not have direct users.

Service relationships may involve service interactions between service provider and service consumer resources in various combinations. People, technology, processes, and third parties may all interact. In some cases, these service interactions do not involve users, as the services are provided to the service consumer's resources in other dimensions. Some examples include:

- Platform and infrastructure as a service. Service provider's technology resources are used by service consumer's technology resources.
- Service consumer's IoT devices communicate with service provider platforms.
- Office cleaning performed outside business hours. Service provider's people clean service consumer's working space, usually with no interactions with people working in the office.
- Street cleaning.
- Audit services.

These examples show that people may be interacting with the service on behalf of the service consumer organizations, but they do not act as users. Quite often, these people are authorized to represent users and interact with the service provider on their behalf.

Sometimes, the lack of human interaction leads the service provider to focus purely on technology and other non-human resources. This leads to a lack of focus on value and the eventual misalignment of the services with the service consumer's needs. It is equally important to develop and maintain a service mindset in organizations and among specialists providing infrastructure, platform, environmental, and other services that do not have direct users but which affect people's work and lives.

When there is little or no human contact between the service provider and the users, it is important to monitor and measure key service quality and experience indicators and analyse the trends and patterns reflecting the users' experience. Service performance transparency is key; the service supplier and consumer may benefit from sharing insights into the service experience information and invest resources in collaborating on understanding. Essentially, they will both understand what the information means in terms of service quality, which may affect value co-creation.

8.1.3 Service mindset for service consumption

Services are a means of value co-creation. Value cannot simply be delivered; it needs the active participation of service consumers. If services are being used by users, their competencies, attitudes, and cultures enable them to become important agents of value co-creation.

Therefore, it is important to ensure that a service mindset is shared by all individuals involved in service consumption, not only by the service provider's teams. The guiding principles should guide all aspects of professional behaviour. Table 8.3 illustrates the key questions that may help develop a service mindset and provides examples of methods which can help develop relevant competencies.

Table 8.3 Service mindset in a service consumer organization

ITIL guiding principle	Key questions	Examples of learning and development methods
Focus on value	What is the service being used for? What are the expected outcomes and value? What service experience is expected? What else contributes to the expected outcomes? How does the service interact with other services and the organization's resources? Are there contradictory stakeholder requirements? How good is the customer (or the service provider) at representing their area of interest?	Awareness training: introducing everyone to the operating model, key value streams, and role of the services in the organization
Start where you are	Are there other ways to achieve the outcomes? Are they proven and effective? What should be retained from the current and previous practices and relationships when the service is being developed/improved?	Regular cross-team meetings to synchronize and maintain a shared understanding of the current state and its context Knowledge management, including access to information about the organization's practices and lessons
Progress iteratively with feedback	How can feedback to the service provider be provided? How can feedback to the service provider and other stakeholders be received? How can feedback be processed to ensure progress?	Online and offline information about available feedback channels Regular meetings of the key users and customers with service providers Joint activities such as testing and training, especially when services are being changed Awareness training and visual information about the organization's continual improvement practice

ITIL guiding principle	Key questions	Examples of learning and development methods
Collaborate and promote visibility	What are the users' and customers' responsibilities during service consumption? Are the requirements being met? Are the agreed rules of service consumption being followed? Where is the band of visibility in the service relationship with the service provider? How is involvement in the joint activities with the service provider going to work? How are joint and visible activities visualized? What tools need to be used to demonstrate progress (such as Kanban boards)? Which decisions and actions should involve the service provider?	Practical and up-to-date knowledge base for users, including visual aids, joint training, and rehearsal for critical service actions Joint training in service empathy/rapport Introduction to work visualization tools such as Kanban Awareness (through training, visual materials, and a knowledge base) of the support channels and available support options Clarify who to contact in different situations and be available when the service provider needs a counterpart
Think and work holistically	What is the context of service consumption, and how does it contribute to the objectives of the organization and to the service consumers' business? How is consumption of the service integrated into the value streams? How can the role of the service be improved/optimized to increase its value? What dependencies and relations should be considered when consuming the service?	Awareness training: introducing everyone to the operating model, key value streams, and role of the services in the organization Introduction and explanation of the organizational changes affecting the service architecture and relationships
Keep it simple and practical	What are the best ways to use the service? If there is an experience improvement opportunity, how can it be initiated?	Awareness (through training, visual materials, knowledge base) of the use and support channels and available options
Optimize and automate	What service actions can be performed as part of service consumption? Are there service actions that can be optimized? Are there manual service actions which could be automated? If there is an improvement opportunity, how can it be initiated?	Awareness training and visual information about the organization's continual improvement practice Incentive programmes for continual improvement, focused on the value of improvement initiatives

8.2 Ongoing service interactions

There are different approaches to provide services to users. The most common options include the following:

- **Pull or push** Service actions may be initiated by users, for example pull. This is the case when the user requests a service on a service portal, downloads an application, calls a service desk, etc. They may also be initiated by the service provider, as in push. For example, the user may get a report every month as part of a subscription or the service provider may update the software on the user's device automatically when a new version is available.
- **Automated or manual** Initiation and implementation of service actions can be automated in different ways:
  - **Technology-free** Technology is not involved in the service provision.
  - **Technology-assisted** Technology is used to support the service provider in the service provision. For example, a service desk representative may use an information system to register and manage requests from users.

- **Technology-facilitated** Both the service provider and the user have access to the same technology as part of the service provision. For example, a service desk representative may use remote access software to take over the screen of a user as they discuss an issue.
- **Technology-mediated** Service is provided without the service provider and the user being in physical proximity. For example, a user may communicate with the service provider through texting.
- **Technology-generated** The service provider, the service consumer, or both are represented entirely by technology. Examples include self-service, chatbots, a service consumer application that automatically requests more storage from the service provider, etc.

- **Tailored or out-of-the-box** Interactions between users and service providers can be standardized for all or for large groups of users or adjusted to fit the requirements and preferences of individual users or small groups.
- **Direct or indirect** Service providers can interact with users using their own resources and employees, or through agents. For example, an airport agent is often used to check in the traveller on behalf of the airline. The service consumer can also provide the service on behalf of the service provider. For example, the customer has agreed a service with an outsourcing company, but the users are still served by the service desk of the service consumer. Examples of this are shown in Figure 8.1.

These approaches are defined as part of service architecture and design, agreed at the early steps of the journey, and applied as part of the co-create step. They have significant influence on user experience; this influence should be considered by the service provider and service consumer from the beginning of the journey.

Depending on the service architecture, service interactions between service consumer and service provider organizations may include:

- **Joint activities** Performing service actions agreed as part of the service, either individually or together
- **Service provision activities**:
  - providing access to agreed resources and using these resources as part of the service
  - supplying and consuming agreed goods
  - maintaining resources involved in service provision at the agreed level of availability, performance, and other quality characteristics

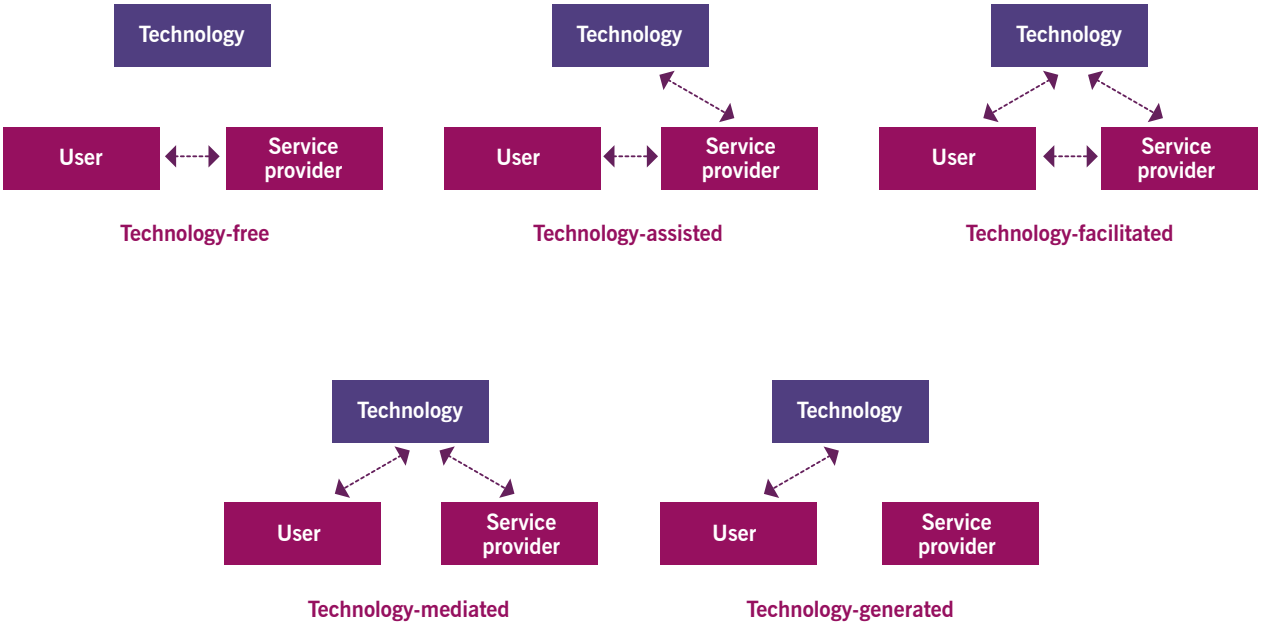

Figure 8.1 Types of service technology encounters

- registering, reporting, detecting, and resolving incidents
- registering, processing, and fulfilling service requests
- registering and handling complaints and compliments
- accepting and processing other user queries
- collecting and processing agreed data about service quality, providing monitoring information to the stakeholders
- where applicable, invoicing for the services provided.

- **Service consumption activities**:
  - accessing and using the resources and goods provided as part of the service
  - performing service actions
  - initiating service requests
  - raising complaints and compliments
  - raising other user queries
  - reporting deviations and incidents where agreed
  - paying for the services provided where applicable.

It is important that the parties understand and shape the activities that are performed within the band of visibility, but they also need to manage the invisible activities on both sides.

In most cases, a service consumer organization is represented by users at this step or, sometimes, by their authorized representative. Their role in service consumption is usually agreed at the previous steps of the service journey and communicated to the users and their representatives. This also includes eligibility criteria, usage rules, safety requirements, liability, etc.

Service provider organizations may be represented by various roles during the activities at this step of the service journey. Some of the roles deal with users directly (service desk agents, support specialists, and any specialists performing service actions for or with users); some roles are focused on the various resources of the service provider or service consumer, but may interact with users occasionally (technical specialists performing maintenance or support of services, or dealing with the service consumer's resources as part of service provision). In the latter case, it is important to ensure that these specialists share the service mindset and focus on the service consumer's value and positive user experience.

8.2.1 Service requests

In many cases, fulfilling service requests is important for the success of value co-creation.

Definition: Service request

A request from a user or a user's authorized representative that initiates a service action which has been agreed as a normal part of service delivery.

Some service requests are designed to enhance value from the service and support the service consumer's business activities. They are initiated at the user's discretion according to the service consumer's procedures

and needs. These requests usually introduce the service actions performed by the service provider, including requests for information, access to resources, and goods transfer.

Other service requests are part of the user's responsibility and should be initiated in order to keep the service in line with the agreement. These usually include user-initiated maintenance and support actions; failing to initiate these may lead to incidents such as service degradation or interruption.

For all types of service requests, rules and conditions should be agreed and communicated to all of the involved roles in both service provider and service consumer organizations. These may include:

- channels and means of initiating a request
- available request options
- responsibilities
- procedures
- timeframes
- authorization (for example, security, financial, and architectural/technological)
- costs and prices
- legal and regulatory requirements
- other constraints.

Service request management contributes to the success of service usage. This provision may be enhanced by:

- user-friendly, interactive service request catalogues, tailored for the user's status and level access request
- self-service interfaces for initiating and fulfilling service requests
- status updates and push notifications about ongoing requests
- proactive communications about service status, requests availability, and new options
- friendly and professional support agents fulfilling requests
- automated fulfilment and delivery, wherever possible and where preferred by users
- collecting and processing feedback
- effective workflows for request fulfilment
- effective integration with other management practices.

Successful initiation, processing, and fulfilment of service requests is enabled by the following ITIL practices:

- change enablement
- IT asset management
- service catalogue management
- service configuration management
- service desk
- service level management
- service request management.

Other ITIL practices may be applied to support service requests in some cases. These include the capacity and performance management, deployment management, information security management, infrastructure and platform management, and release management practices.

Key message

The purpose of the service desk practice is to capture demand for incident resolution and service requests. It should also be the entry point and single point of contact for the service provider for all of its users.

8.2.2 Service desk interactions

When users interact with service providers, they do so through the dedicated interfaces or channels provided by the service desk practice. These interfaces may take various forms, but they have a common purpose: to ensure that user requests are captured and processed in line with the agreements and expectations that are established between the service provider and the service consumer.

It is important for the service relationship to be successful and that service desk interfaces, procedures, and rules are agreed by the parties and communicated to all users at the onboarding step. These interfaces and procedures should be simple, user-friendly, and easy to follow. The service desk practice should be continually improved based on feedback from users to ensure a positive user experience.

The service desk should be closely integrated with other practices within the service provision and support value streams. This will ensure that categorized tickets that are initiated by users are processed effectively and promptly and that relevant information is communicated to users. Table 8.4 provides a list of common triage criteria for service queries and respective practices that are usually involved in queries processing. These practices should be integrated with service desk practice.

Table 8.4 User queries: triage criteria and key practices involved in their processing

Triaging criteria	Service query type	Key ITIL practices involved
Agreed SLAs are breached or user reports a negative experience	Incidents	Incident management
Agreed conditions for an emergency situation are met or the query can be linked to an ongoing registered disaster	Disasters	Service continuity management
Valid service request option is selected from the service request catalogue	Service requests	Service request management
Valid change option is selected from service catalogue which is available to the user	Change requests	Change enablement
User reports negative experience that is known as not breaching any agreed SLA (complaint) or user reports a positive experience for the record	Complaints and compliments	Relationship management
User proposes improvements that are not covered by available options of service catalogue (including service request catalogue)	Improvement proposals	Continual improvement
User reports suspicious activities or events that may indicate threats to information security	Suspicious activities and events	Information security management

There should be agreed rules for the triage and prioritization of incoming queries. Users should be aware of the agreed timeframes when their queries are being processed. This depends on such factors as:

- type of query
- time and date of query
- channel of contact
- service/resource
- level of service/user
- impact
- expected resolution time
- other agreed factors.

Users should also be kept updated about the progress of their query process, changes in estimated time of processing, and other important information. These updates should be provided through agreed channels.

8.2.3 When things go wrong

Incidents and dissatisfaction cases can happen when a service is provided or consumed. Creating a perfect service experience can be difficult, if not impossible. However, dealing with dissatisfaction and incidents is important. Service providers should be prepared for incidents and complaints; every team operating within the band of visibility, even if not dealing with users directly, should know how to address these situations.

Adopting the service mindset, including service empathy, is important for turning issues into opportunities to improve services and users' loyalty and trust. Following the ITIL guiding principles, service providers can manage complaints and incidents in the following ways:

- focus on value and quick restoration of value co-creation
- collect and provide feedback
- communicate with the affected users transparently and honestly
- demonstrate understanding and empathy
- keep interactions and advice simple and practical
- exercise intelligent disobedience, where appropriate.

The effective resolution of incidents and dissatisfaction cases is enabled by the following ITIL practices:

- continual improvement
- incident management
- knowledge management
- relationship management
- service desk
- service request management.

Integrating these practices into user support value streams helps to ensure effective communication, quick restoration of normal service, mitigation of misunderstandings, and improvement to interaction channels and procedures.

8.2.4 Moments of truth

A moment of truth is a key touchpoint or service interaction between the service provider and a user in which the user forms or changes his or her impression of any aspect of the service experience, service organization, products, or services.

Moments of truth may arise from positive and negative events. Although every single service interaction or touchpoint is a potential moment of truth, not all service interactions and touchpoints are one. Moments of truth are the service interactions and touchpoints that make or break the service experience for a specific user.

Therefore, the service provider should be aware of potential moments of truth. The service provider organization should possess the resources and capabilities to make the right decisions and provide the right service.

Essentially, the service provider should consider turning negative events into positive moments of truth.

8.2.5 Intelligent disobedience

Intelligent disobedience is the act of breaking the rules to do the right thing. In terms of service relationships, perception advantages typically include factors such as familiarity, direct involvement with a service, or awareness of a user's or customer's needs. This knowledge is valuable and beneficial.

Intelligent disobedience is simple and common in our everyday lives and, in most cases, it can be helpful and genuine. Minor displays of intelligent disobedience that improve our lives are regularly appreciated; for example, a shop manager who delays closing to allow customers to finish their shopping.

There will always be unexpected issues to manage in which existing rules are not helpful or sensible. In these cases, the service experience depends on the staff who interact with customers and users, correctly assessing whether the rules should be followed or suspended. This means that, in order to maximize the value delivered to customers, service providers should:

- recognize that the rules in place will not always be appropriate to the situation
- encourage and equip staff with the knowledge and skills to identify legitimate customer requirements and to perceive and fulfil those requirements
- create an environment where staff feel confident to act outside the rules when circumstances dictate
- ensure that actions are documented to improve rules and future understanding.

The intelligent disobedience approach is a valuable tool for some conditions in which the rules are inappropriate. However, it is important to remember that a default response to any given situation should be to follow the rules. When a situation requires intelligent disobedience, the actions should be documented to allow audit and control, but also so that the rules can be adapted in the future if necessary. Intelligent disobedience can be a source of improvement, as the need to work around existing rules will help to shape them into broader and better rules. Obviously, allowing staff to break rules is not without risk. There is no guarantee that innovative action will deliver better service than following the rules would, even when those rules feel wrong to the front-line staff.

In some environments, such as highly regulated and contractual constrained environments, it may be difficult to convince the service provider's staff to break the rules to do the right thing. People may fear non-compliance and escalate the situation to higher levels in the organization. If intelligent disobedience is desirable in these environments, procedures and contracts should explicitly allow for deviations and a clear process for learning.

8.2.6 Customer and user feedback

Customer and user feedback is important for the success of the service relationship and continual improvement of services. Service providers are interested in open, direct, and comprehensive opinions about their services and related user and customer experiences. However, many users and customers are reluctant to provide open and honest feedback. This reluctance is often related to past negative experiences.

An important task for service providers is gathering and processing effective feedback. Table 8.5 provides a summary of ideas that can help in this task.

Table 8.5 Challenges and solutions for continual customer and user feedback

Stakeholders providing feedback	Challenges	Possible solutions applied by service providers
Users	People do not believe that their opinions will be heard and acted upon. Channels for feedback are not convenient or available. People do not have time for feedback provision. People may be afraid of being punished for negative feedback. People assume somebody else has provided the same opinion earlier.	Establish and clearly communicate a policy of welcoming every opinion. Process all feedback individually and, and far as possible, manually. Do not limit responses to automated messages. Maintain an up-to-date log of the service improvements initiated by user feedback; make their progress visible for all users; consider advertising subscriptions to updates. Where possible, involve the improvement initiators in testing and implementing the improvements. Reward active feedback and improvement initiatives. Use gamification (levels, digital badges) within user communities to praise active contributors. Actively seek feedback and reward participation with meaningful benefits. Ensure that feedback channels and interfaces are convenient, secure, and compliant with regulations, and work as intended. Test all interfaces and channels before contacting users. Monitor social media and user communities. Provide fast and constructive responses through social media. Follow the guiding principles in planning, collecting, and processing feedback.
Customers	Customers expect service providers to collect feedback from users and consider it sufficient. Customers expect service providers to ask for feedback, rather than wait for it. Customers do not have time for feedback; sometimes they also do not have time for listening to users' opinions and base their view of services purely on reports. Channels for feedback are not convenient or available.	Establish and clearly communicate a policy of welcoming every opinion. Provide information about users' feedback to customers, and consider including it in SLA reporting. Have regular human-to-human feedback sessions with customers, especially after important touchpoints and moments of truth. Ensure that feedback channels and interfaces are convenient, secure, compliant with regulations, and work as intended. Test all interfaces and channels before contacting customers. Follow the guiding principles in planning, collecting, and processing the feedback. Make feedback processing transparent to customers in various forms.

The ITIL story: Step 6 – Co-create

Radhika: *After our service was launched, we discovered that one of our customer pain points was arriving to collect a car they had booked, only to discover it had not been returned yet. We knew that this happened most frequently during peak hours, but we did not understand why people were often returning their cars late, or how to make sure it happened less frequently.*

Mariana: *Our first idea was to introduce fines for late returns. However, before we jumped to potential solutions, we invited some of our customers to attend a co-design workshop so we could understand and empathize with their issues.*

Solmaz: *We found that our customers were often unfamiliar with local traffic, for example, and would underestimate the amount of time needed to complete their errands. Introducing fines would not typically incentivize timely return. Following the co-creation research and further research, we are trialling an alert system that notifies both the current and next passenger of the car's location and its expected return time.*

Katrina: *It was great to be included in the workshop to help eCampus Car Share understand and empathize with customers around the issue of late returns. Late fees would make the service less desirable for me, because I cannot always predict traffic. By co-creating a solution, I feel as if my contributions have been acknowledged and a more equitable solution has been found.*

8.3 Nurturing user communities

User communities can be valuable components of service interactions during normal operations, incidents, and other difficulties. Peer support, knowledge articles, discussions, and improvement initiatives can help to decrease users' demand for support from the service provider and move support closer to the user (shift left), provide valuable insights and improvement opportunities, and help in communicating news and status updates.

In many cases, user communities form naturally, especially when services are provided to many individual and corporate service consumers. However, they can also emerge within organizations, particularly if users do not feel enough support from the service provider. Either way, communities can become a powerful means of communication and cooperation between users and service providers.

User communities can be established by the service provider and can unite all service users. They can also be formed by user groups and cover multiple services from multiple service providers: for example, communities within service consumer organizations, or communities of professionals in specific areas. In the latter case, the active participation of the service provider in the community usually works better than an attempt to switch users to an official community established by the service provider. Recognizing the communities established by and for users and valuable participation in these groups can improve a service provider's image and users' loyalty. At the same time, it is important to remember that these communities may be closed to some users. In this case, the service provider can establish one or more groups using other platforms and channels. When services are provided to a diverse audience, it is likely that the service provider will have to manage several communities using different platforms, languages, and communication styles.

Behind the band of visibility, these communities may be linked to a shared knowledge base and supported by the same expert teams.

User communities that are created and run by service providers may be designed and managed as services.

User communities created and run by user groups themselves may be supported by the service provider's representatives. This participation is usually enabled by the following ITIL practices:

- incident management
- knowledge management
- problem management
- relationship management
- service catalogue management
- service desk
- service request management
- service validation and testing.

Integrating these practices within user support value streams helps to capture the community's questions, provide advice, suggest services and service requests, recommend workarounds and self-service solutions, announce new opportunities, etc.

8.3.1 Super-users

Many communities and groups adopt a system of user ratings or statuses based on how useful a member's activity is in the group. Individuals who provide more useful advice and comments receive some form of recognition. Group feedback is used to assess how useful the input is. These members are called gurus or experts and may have more rights and authority in the community. For example, they may act as community administrators, with the right to moderate discussions.

If these groups are established by service providers, super-users may be appointed by the service provider and enrolled in the service provider's practices. If the groups are established by the customer, then roles and responsibilities, workflows and procedures, and tool support should ideally be agreed with the service provider. If the groups are user-established, service providers may find it useful to cooperate with the super-users, providing them with access to expert knowledge, involving them in internal discussions, and otherwise improving their expertise in the products and services. This may help super-users to develop their professional expertise and optimize the service provider's resources used to support user communities.

In a corporate environment, service providers may identify super-users within user groups and involve them in establishing a user community. Super-users may be involved in support, communication, training, specification of user stories and requirements, demos, and validating and testing to improve the relationships between the service provider and the users.

It is not easy to establish and maintain an effective group of super-users. Super-users are seldom assigned to the role full-time and are often unpaid. They are motivated by interest, a desire to help, and community recognition. As a result, the service provider cannot rely on their support when needed. If the super-users are part of the same legal entity as the customer and sponsor, a solution may be to enter a third-party agreement between the service provider, the customer, and the super-user to allocate a certain percentage of time for the super-user activities and to ensure back-up in periods of unavailability. The service provider may also frequently gather the super-users to inform, educate, and nurture them to increase their dedication to the role.

The ITIL story: Nurturing user communities

Mariana: *We are using established online communities on various social media sites to interact with existing and potential customers.*

Solmaz: *We considered creating our own community for this but decided that, for the audience we are currently targeting, it would be more valuable to participate in existing communities that already have large followings.*

Mariana: *Interacting with these communities will help us to build stronger relationships with our customers and get a better understanding of what they are looking for in a car rental service.*

8.4 Summary

The service consumer makes use of accessible service provider resources, consumes the goods provided, and acts together with the service provider to co-create value based on the agreed service offerings. A service mindset, combined with mature practices for effective, seamless, and ingenious handling of user interactions and deviations, is key to value co-creation and user experience.